The Paradox of Immigration Politics: Revisiting the Dynamics of Philippine *Nikkeijin* Labor Migration

Ron Bridget Vilog
International Studies Department
De La Salle University
ron.vilog@dlsu.edu.ph

Abstract: Under the 1990 Immigration Control Act, *nikkeijin* or descendants of Japanese nationals who were born in foreign countries were granted limited rights to reside and work in Japan. Notwithstanding the contradictions of the policy framework, *nikkeijin* migration remains dynamic and robust. Impelled by socio-economic and cultural factors, Filipino *nikkeijin* have demonstrated an enduring cycle of migration, indicating socio-economic and cultural embeddedness within the host society. Thus, this paper discussed how Filipino *nikkeijin* acquired their *nikkei* recognition, initiated the migration process, and sustained massive flow despite Japan's problematic immigration policies. Exploring the notion of Tsuda's (1999) "structural embeddedness," the paper highlights the role of generation upgrading and transnational practices in sustaining migration. Using the narratives of 60 third-generation *nikkeijin* workers in Aichi Prefecture, I argued that the paradox of immigration politics remained systemic and detrimental to social integration. Notably, the influx of "opportunity" *nikkeijin* migrants from the Philippines needs further attention as this movement offers potential remedies to Japan's demographic problems. It is therefore necessary to scrutinize the "disconnect" between the policy framework and actual migration trends, and the socio-cultural and political landscape that determine the pattern of *nikkeijin* mobility between Japan and the Philippines.

Keywords: Filipino *nikkeijin*, migration, migrant motivation, labor migration

In June 1990, Japan formally legalized the entry of *nikkeijin* or returning descendants of Japanese nationals who emigrated before and after the Second World War. This policy came against the backdrop of Japan's rapid industrialization, the increasing number of *nikkeijin* from Latin America who were migrating to Japan, and the financial crisis gripping Brazil. Determined to buttress the booming economy, the Japanese government took advantage of the returning Japanese-Brazilians who provided the indispensable labor force for the operation of

factories. With the *nikkeijin* being viewed as co-ethnic of the local citizens, legalizing their entry seemed to be a fair compromise between Japan's xenophobia and the need for additional workforce.

This phenomenon of returning *nikkeijin* has attracted the attention of several scholars who were interested to examine not only the shifts and turns of the labor market, but also the impact of international migration on ethnic identities. Mostly studied are the cases of Brazilian *nikkeijin* who have eagerly returned to Japan through "commodified migration system" (Higuchi, 2003); that is, using the assistance of recruitment offices and agencies that benefit from commercially-induced mobility. Interestingly, beyond economic motivations, Brazilian *nikkeijin* were found to have social and cultural reasons. With the affluence and high social status that they enjoyed in their own country, Brazilian *nikkeijin* were eager to discover the homeland of their forefathers.

The experience of the Brazilian *nikkeijin* is far different from what the Philippine *nikkeijin* had gone through during those times. Discriminated for the negative image that the Japanese soldiers had during the World War II, the "yearning" of Philippine *nikkeijin* to discover their ethnic identity came later than their Brazilian counterparts. And while there was a genuine desire to experience their ancestral culture, the stronger motivation was economic, much like other Overseas Filipino Workers (OFWs) who leave the country for a short contractual sojourn.

The Philippine *nikkeijin* were nonetheless quick to catch up with their counterparts. With the natural lure of foreign migration among Filipinos and the encouragement of Japanese NGOs that called attention to the plight of the descendants, the next decade has seen an increasing trend of *nikkeijin* migration from the Philippines. Despite what seemed to be a success in obtaining their right to be recognized, however, entry to Japan was just a part of the struggle. Indeed, among

the intents of the 1990 Immigration Law was to provide a meaningful cultural experience while integrating the *nikkeijin* community to the Japanese society. In reality, however, the law is still restrictive, and the Philippine *nikkeijin*, while taking on factory jobs in Japan, had a hard time engaging themselves with the locals.

Looking at the rising number of the Philippine *nikkeijin* entering Japan, despite the socio-political complications of immigration dynamics, therefore raises these questions: What motivated them to leave their homeland and work in Japanese factories? How do these motivations and general migration pattern correspond to the immigration framework set by the Japanese government in the 1990s? This paper then presents the paradox of policy objectives and the actual migration trends of the Philippine *nikkeijin* workers. Amidst the contrasting dynamics of migration flows and restrictive policy framework, this paper attempts to explain the continuous entry and burgeoning of the Filipino *nikkeijin* community.

In attaining the objectives of this paper, I collected narratives from September 2011 to January 2013 in Aichi Prefecture. Located in Central Japan, Aichi is host to the global companies specializing in aerospace, precision ceramics, electronic equipment, and automotive industry, the most famous of which is the Toyota Motors. In addition, traditional industries such as textiles, agriculture, and pottery remain vibrant throughout the prefectural area (Aichi Prefectural Government, 2011). Aichi thus boasts of industrial power: 81% of the 285 factories in 2001-2005 are owned by firms originally situated in Aichi Prefecture (Dept. of Industry and Labor, Aichi Prefecture, as cited in Nibe, 2008, p. 55). Understandably, Aichi has become one of the main destinations of Filipino workers in Japan.

In-depth interviews were conducted with 60 *nikkeijin* working in food, electronic, and automotive manufacturing centers. All interviewees are third- generation (*sansei*) *nikkeijin* who are currently holding Long

Term or Permanent Resident Status. Out of 60 interviewees, 20 (33%) are females and 40 are males. As to their pre-migration origin, 18 interviewees came from the Southern part of the Philippines (Davao, Cotabato, General Santos, and Surigao), nine are from Northern Philippines (Ilocos, Baguio, and Isabela), 13 are from Metro Manila, and 20 are from other parts of the country.

As a case study, the sampling is not meant to present a generalized situation of the Philippine *nikkeijin*, but to generate an understanding culled from the experience of these selected and limited pool of respondents, in the hope of further expanding it in the future to include experiences of Filipino *nikkeijin* in other parts of Japan as well.

To contextualize the narratives within the theoretical parameters of migration dynamics, I employed Tsuda's structural embeddedness (1999) which examines the multilayered factors that sustain migration in a transnational and globalized setting. Focusing his scholarship on Brazilian-Japanese immigrants, Tsuda (1999) utilized the said framework to observe "how stable immigrant population become firmly embedded in the host society, persisting in a longer period of time, even if the economic incentives which encourage migrants to remain abroad considerably weaken" (p. 692). In exploring the nuanced subtleties of temporary sojourn, prolonged settlement, and elusive government policies, the study therefore exposes the underlying forces that prolong migration, notwithstanding their superficial *nikkeijin* identity and weak accommodation policies of their host country.

In the first half of the paper, I will explain the rationale for the opening of Japan's doors for the *nikkeijin*, the qualifications and processes they had to undergo, followed by the "politics of recognition" orchestrated by the Japanese descendants and their supporters in the Philippines and Japan. In the second half, I will discuss the

motivations of the Philippine *nikkeijin* during their temporary sojourn. The factors that led them to be "structurally embedded" to the Japanese society and economy will be clearly threshed out. I will then conclude with a juxtaposition of the experience of the Filipino *nikkeijin* against the social, economic, and cultural factors of structural embeddedness highlighted by Tsuda.

THE LEGAL DIMENSION OF NIKKEI MIGRATION

By and large, Japan's immigration policy is noted for its restrictions on foreign labor. Japan's citizenship and migration laws reflect the country's historical closure and isolation for more than 200 years. The *sakoku* (locked country) mentality has aggravated the xenophobia, conspiring with the principles of insularity and myths of ethnic homogeneity, and the general perception that foreigners are outsiders that threaten and disrupt Japanese purity (Morris-Suzuki, 2010, p.10).

Since the 1980s, thousands of Japanese descendants have traveled across the Pacific to explore better employment opportunities in Japan. These *nikkeijin* migrants, who had lived in Brazil and other Latin American countries, believed that they possess the ethnic right to be incorporated into Japanese society. The immigration debate has shaken conservative ideologies, weighed against the economic enterprises' rising demand for additional manpower that local labor market could not supply. Finally, in the early 1990s, Japan inked a major policy revision that legally allowed foreign nationals who are ethnically Japanese to reside and work in their ancestral country. This landmark law opened an opportunity for Japanese descendants around the world to return to Japan and regain their "lost Japanese identity." However, the opening of Japan's doors has been thoroughly political and selective, especially in the case of Filipino *nikkeijin.*

The 1990 Immigration Act (Shutsunyūkoku Kanri Oyobi Nammin Nintei Hō) officially granted the *nikkeijin* permission to emigrate, live, and work in Japan. Basing on "blood ties", *nikkeijin* up to the third-generation, as well as their spouses and children, were given teijūsha visa, which allows them to stay in Japan for one year with unlimited renewals. This opportunity is granted to Japanese descendants "on the qualification of a certain level of blood relations with Japanese" (Sharpe, 2010, p. 359). For the Ministry of Justice, the return migration of *nikkeijin* was the perfect solution to resolve the crippling manpower problem of several industries because nikkei are Japanese descent co-ethnics; they are not "socially and ethnically disrupting like other foreign workers" (Tsuda, 2010, p. 627). Another highlight of this policy revision is the permission granted by the government to the *nikkeijin* laborers to perform unskilled jobs, for which other foreigners were not eligible. Throughout Japan's history of immigration, this policy is truly exceptional as "no restrictions were placed on labor by foreigners of Japanese ancestry" (Tanno, 2010, p. 117). On one hand, this policy was grounded on the belief that "the *nikkeijin* would fit in better with Japanese society," considering their ancestral ties and cultural proximity (Rebick, 2005, p. 160). For the crafters of the 1990 policy, the descendants of the Japanese, no matter where they come from, possess certain qualities that are compatible with the ways of life in Japanese society. On the other hand, the revision also reflects the duality of honne and tatemae: "whilst officially the motives invoked were to defend history and culture, in reality they were more to do with controlling the number of workers from China and other Asian countries" (de Carvalho, 2003, p. 80). As a result of the policy amendment, the *nikkeijin* emerged as the largest group among foreign workers. The *nikkei* population currently residing in Japan is approximately 400,000, one of the biggest newcomer groups in Japan (Ohno, 2008).

During the initial years of the policy implementation, Japan had just entered a period of economic stagnation, triggered by the bursting of the bubble economy. With the economic difficulties in the 1990s, Japanese companies had started to lay off their staff and workers, ending Japan's traditional lifetime employment system while initiating measures such as voluntary retirement plans (Wah, 1999). Instead of hiring local workers who demand higher wages and long-term benefits, Japanese employers became more reliant on temporary laborers, particularly Brazilian *nikkeijin* who were technically "borrowed" from certain brokerage agencies. This system has significantly reduced labor costs, enabling numerous industries to survive the looming recession. In fact, despite the hallowing of various industries, the number of *nikkeijin* entrants continuously increased due to their advantageous position in Japan's labor market. Tsuda (1999, p. 697), in his study, characterized *nikkeijin* as "immigrants who do not budge." Brazilian *nikkeijin*, in particular, have been generally insulated from the worst effects of the Japanese recession because of their status being disposable and flexible workers: they can be easily hired, and they can be easily fired when the factory administrators think that their services are no longer needed. Thus, they were mostly preferred by the companies during the crisis-ridden period.

In July 2012, another revision was implemented for migrant workers. Japan started the new residency management system, which applies to "mid- to long-term residents in Japan, such as those married to a Japanese national, as well as Japanese descendants (*nikkeijin*), whose status of residence is Spouse or Child of Japanese National (Nihonjin no Haigūsha Tō), and Long Term Resident (Chōki Zairyūsha), etc." (Immigration Information Center, 2012, p. 3) According to the provision, the said migrants may stay for a period of 5 years, 3 years, 1 year, or 6 months, depending on the assessment of the Immigration Bureau.

In sum, there has been no significant revision in Japan's immigration policies since the 1990s. In spite of the incremental changes in migration scheme and the policy adjustments to accommodate more high skilled workers (see Fuess, 2003), the general framework, principles, and the fundamental configuration of Japan's migration laws remain insensitive to the changing policy environment. Such ineptitude led Vogt (2013, p. 14) to argue that Japan's migration policy is "designed to fail," thereby setting an example of an "indecisive character of the state's politics and its isolationist tendencies."

The Japanese government, according to official pronouncements, has opened the doors for *nikkeijin* to provide them opportunities to visit their relatives in Japan. Consequently, they were given "quasi-permanent residence status which has to be renewed at certain periods" (Kondo, 2002, p. 424). Considering the complicated procedures for settlement, this policy framework demonstrates the rigidity of the immigration law even for the ethnic repatriates. Although renewal processes of long term resident is relatively easy, obtaining permanent resident status proved to be tremendously difficult. Acquiring Japanese citizenship has also been made possible for the *nikkeijin*, albeit the exceedingly challenging qualifications and requirements which made it unappealing for the *nikkeijin*. Thus, I argue that there is an evident paradox in Japan's immigration politics: while the government promoted immigration and even prioritized the entry of their co-ethnic *nikkeijin,* immigration policies fail to provide them adequate support for their long-term or even permanent settlement and integration.

Another paradox that will be expounded in the succeeding parts of the paper is the fact that Filipino *nikkeijin* view migration as a temporary economic sojourn rather than a cultural journey to visit their ancestral home. To contextualize the recent economic struggles of the *nikkeijin* prior to migration, the next section discusses the social conditions that led to the campaign for political recognition of the Philippine *nikkeijin*.

STRUGGLE AND POLITICAL RECOGNITION

As of the 1995 counting of the Nihon Keizai Shimbun, there are roughly 10,000 third generation *nikkeijin*, but the figure climbs to 60,000 to 70,000 if fourth generation *nikkei* are included (Komai, 2001, p. 32). In the absence of official registry certificates and other legal documents, it was impossible for the Japanese government to come up with an official count of the Philippine *nikkeijin*. However, NGOs and print media have provided a rough estimate based on the number of registered households in Japan, combined with unofficial count or survey conducted by various private and state-sponsored *nikkeijin* organizations. It is unfortunate, however, that a number of these descendants do not possess the necessary documents to prove their consanguinity, thereby making them unable to repatriate to Japan.

While the flow of *nikkeijin* from Brazil, Peru, and other Latin American countries remained robust during the 1990s, the Philippine *nikkeijin* were not immediately recognized during this decade. Most of them did not possess *koseki tōhon* or the family registry where the names of the household including children and descendants are listed and kept at the municipal government. Furthermore, since "Filipino nikkeijin" were mostly impoverished during the past decades, they had no access to proper information with regard to their ancestral origin and the prospect of ethnic return migration.

The lack of documents that prove consanguinity to Japanese ancestors is attributed to the historical occurrences that shaped a hostile socio-political environment to the nikkei during and after the war. In some cases, the parents of the Filipino *nikkei* descendants purposely refused to register their marriage with their Filipino partners in their

koseki in order to retain the Filipino citizenship of their spouse and children. By retaining Filipino citizenship, the opportunity of owning land and other properties in the Philippines would not be questioned by the Philippine authorities. In other cases, Japanese nationals and their children and spouses had to burn or throw all documents due to the threat of discrimination and physical harm during the aftermath of the world war when anti-Japanese sentiment was very strong in various areas of the archipelago (Ohno, 2007). Most second-generation *nikkei* changed their surnames into Filipino or Chinese surnames to avoid being distinguished as Japanese mestizo. As a survival strategy, the descendants "abandoned relevant documents showing their relationship with their Japanese husbands and fathers in order to conceal their Japaneseness" (Ohno, 2007, p. 248). Also, *nikkeijin* during this period had to "sublimate or hide" not only their Japanese identity but also their heritage (Mabunay, 2006, p.162).

In the 1970s, the relationship between Japan and the Philippines had nearly normalized through the efforts of the state leaders of the two countries. Japan and the Philippines had signed the Treaty of Amity, Commerce, and Navigation after previous reparation agreements and economic development loan arrangements that led to the "neutralization" of political ties. Japan, since then, has become the largest source of foreign aid to the Philippines. Moreover, the growing economic power of Japan has been widely reported by international media, thereby boosting the confidence of the Japanese people and cleansing the previously tainted reputation of the nation. By then, the image of the *nikkeijin* as an "enemy race" gradually diminished, while the identity of being a *nikkei* in the Philippines became more positive in light of the improving global influence of Japan. In fact, Japan has been seen as a model of development and modernization (Yu-Jose, 2000), with the country's growing economy as a source of inspiration among developing countries, most especially

in the Philippines. Group consciousness and solidarity among Filipino *nikkeijin* heightened the struggle for "recognition" in both Philippine and Japanese societies. Their past experiences of oppression in the Philippines reinforced their movement for support and recognition, a battle for "empowerment," which was initially spearheaded by groups such as the Philippine Nikkeijin Kai (PNJK) in Davao City, with support from concerned groups in Japan (Fresnoza-Flot, 2008).

Few decades had passed until the issue of war-displaced people resurfaced. In 1995, international and Japanese local media captured the recollections and legacies of Japanese Occupation in celebration of the 50th anniversary of the Pacific War. In a remarkable event, 32 second-generation Filipino *nikkeijin* had travelled to Japan through the support of some Japanese medium-sized enterprises, which advocated the hiring of Japanese descendants to resolve their labor shortage. This group of Filipino *nikkeijin* wrote a letter addressed to Prime Minister Murayama Tomiichi, urging the Japanese government to recognize the Firipin Zanryū Nihonjin and issue them a Japanese passport (Ohno, 2007, p. 250).

Responding to the political calls coming from both the Philippine and Japanese pressure groups, the Japanese government initiated technical projects to trace the ancestors of Filipino *nikkeijin* in Japan and help them obtain a visa to their ancestral homeland. One notable project supported by the government was the *shūseki* project of Nippon Foundation, which intended to restore the family registry of alleged Filipino *nikkeijin* for a three-year period starting August 2006. *Shūseki* is a new family registry created upon a decision of a family court if a Japanese national cannot locate his or her father's *koseki*. This project sought all legal evidence of ancestral ties of a *nikkei* applicant to convince the Japanese court that the candidate has the right to be a Japanese national. If approved, a new family

registry (*koseki*) is created, and the applicant as well as his/her spouse and children shall be granted a visa to Japan. According to PNLSC, the approval of *shūseki* will entitle the *nikkeijin* to the following: 1) May travel to Japan with Japanese passport and settle there if they have enough financial means; 2) Second-generation shall enjoy full civil and political rights as Japanese and be subject to all attendant liabilities and responsibilities under existing laws of Japan; and 3) Their children and grandchildren can apply (for) a long term residence visa for Japan (Philippine Nikkeijin Legal Support Center, Inc., 2013).

Shūseki, or the creation of new family registry, paved the way for the entry of hundreds of descendants who had no documentary evidence of their ethnic background. Through the support of various Japanese groups and lawmakers, Filipino *nikkeijin* have finally gotten the approval of the Japanese government for recognition albeit the tedious screening processes. Eventually, foundations, brokers, and recruitment agencies mushroomed in the Philippines and supported the migration of the later generations. With the substantial role of labor agencies, it is important to note Castles' (2000) observation that labor recruiters and migration agents may even be more powerful than state policies in sustaining human mobility.

Another organization that meticulously conducted research to obtain legal support for the thousands of unrecognized *nikkeijin* in the Philippines is the Philippine Nikkeijin Legal Support Center (PNLSC). The center has won hundreds of legal battles that consequently led to the increase of Filipino *nikkeijin* population in Japan. According to Yoko Tajika of PNLSC (personal communication, July 3, 2013), the organization is handling 162 *shūseki* petition cases: 90 of those were approved, seven were not approved, 19 were withdrawn, while the others are still pending. One case involving Suzuki's *koseki* took years before it was finally approved

by the court. The nikkei descendant shared her emotions during the finalization of her legal battle:

> *Since I was a young child, I never stopped hoping to trace the whereabouts of my father Captain Yoshio Suzuki. In spite of all the hardships and trials that I experienced, my desire to be acknowledged as a Japanese citizen never ceased. I am really optimistic that in His perfect time He will grant my prayers—that is, to be recognized as a Japanese—Filipino descendant. That's why when I received the news that my shūseki petition was already approved, the happiness that I felt was indescribable.* (PNLSC, 2013)

Another case petitioner, Teodora Tanaka, also commented:

> *When informed that my shūseki petition was approved, tears fall down from my eyes* (sic)*. It was tears of joy because my dream became a reality. I am now proud to tell our neighbors that someday my grandchildren will have a better life and bright future.* (PNLSC, 2013)

These comments from second-generation *nikkeijin* highlight how greatly they desired to be recognized by the Japanese state. They emphasized their ethnic right of becoming a legal Japanese, and shared their excitement of going to the land of their forefathers. Most importantly, these *nikkeijin,* through these statements, have revealed that the filing of *shūseki* was envisioned for the economic advantage of their descendants. After all, the struggle for recognition is merely instrumental to obtain access to Japan's labor market for those aspiring *nikkeijin* who want to improve their economic condition. As I will further expound in the next sections, *nikkeijin* migration has been fought neither for the idea of repatriation nor homecoming. Instead, it is an economic pursuit under the guise of ethnicity-based return migration.

SOCIO-ECONOMIC FACTORS OF MIGRATION: PHILIPPINE CONTEXT

While conventional neoclassical thinkers consider economic pressures and aggregations "instantiated by rational individual choices" (Iosifides, 2011, p. 19) as the main forces behind labor movement, the case of *nikkeijin* shows an interesting migrant dynamics, as social and cultural components are also part of their migratory dilemma.

Technically, *nikkeijin* are not regular Overseas Filipino Workers (OFWs) due to the fact that they are given long-term resident or permanent resident status in Japan. In effect, *nikkeijin* workers are not closely monitored by the Philippine government through migrant-overseeing agencies such as POEA and OWWA. The only agency that deals with pre-migration concerns of the Filipino *nikkeijin* is the Commission on Filipinos Overseas, which is tasked by the Philippine government to "promote and uphold the interests of Filipino emigrants and permanent residents abroad, and to preserve and strengthen ties with Filipino communities overseas" (Commission on Filipinos Overseas, 2014).

Migration has become the most popular strategy to alleviate poverty and attain financial security in a short period of time. As early as 1988, former President Corazon Aquino extolled Filipino migrant workers as the "New Heroes" (Okamura, 1998, p. 133). Migrant workers, including the *nikkeijin*, have been commended for their contributions to keeping the Philippine economy afloat through the remittances that they provide. Boosting domestic spending and the country's current account, remittances in 2012 constituted 8.6% of the country's GDP, less than the 10.4% of GDP in 2006 (Dumlao, 2014). The suceeding sections will highlight the narratives that elucidate the motivations behind *nikkeijin* migration.

Economic Motivations

Similar to the Brazilian *nikkeijin* who migrated to Japan with a 'temporary sojourner'

mentality, Filipino *nikkeijin* may also be considered as economic and "opportunity" migrants, with the intention of modestly improving and maintaining their socio-economic well-being. Nikkei Brazilians belong solidly to the middle class, with remarkable educational accomplishments and reasonable credentials for white-collar jobs in Brazil. Likewise, many Filipino *nikkeijin* interviewed in this study have obtained college diplomas with relevant work experiences in the Philippines. This implies that the reason for migration is not because of utmost poverty or lack of employment opportunities, but because of what Tsuda calls "relative deprivation." Explaining it in the case of Brazilian *nikkeijin*, Tsuda (2003) observed that being opportunity migrants, most of them migrate not because of economic impoverishment, but simply because they want to support their middle-class standard of living and they wish to improve their declining economic situation during the crisis-ridden period in their country.

In the interviews conducted, majority of the respondents described their pre-migration economic status in phrases such as: "mahirap ang buhay" (life is tough); "nakakaraos naman" (we just get by anyway); "maliit ang sahod," (we don't earn enough); and "masaya pero walang pera," (we are happy but we don't have money). These expressions imply financial deprivation in spite of having stable employment prior to migration. Asked what their parents do for a living, most of them revealed that they have their own farm in the provinces. Considering their educational attainment and family livelihood, it can be surmised that most *nikkeijin* do not fall within the category of being poor. This has been proven by a preliminary survey conducted prior to the interviews which shows that there were only nine out of 60 respondents or 15% who described their pre-migration lives as "poor". Such self-perception can be explained by the fact that the third-generation *nikkeijin* had been

beneficiaries of their first- and second-generation relatives before they left the Philippines.

The relatives of the *nikkeijin* as well as the relatives of their spouses are the direct economic beneficiaries of *nikkeijin* migration. Aside from the financial returns, Filipino migrants including the *nikkeijin* are also noted for the social remittances that they contribute. The skills, experiences, and ideas of the returnee have influenced other relatives to join the bandwagon of *nikkei* migrants. Social remittances, as defined by Levitt (1998, p. 926) are the "ideas, behaviors, identities, and social capital that flow from receiving- to sending-country communities." The knowledge, skills, talents, and some aspects of culture acquired from working abroad are brought back to their home communities in the Philippines. In most cases, these skills have enabled them to make prolific investments out of their savings. Martin, Abella, and Midgley (2004, p.1557) noted that Filipino migrant returnees were able to open stores, operate jeepneys, raise pigs or poultry, or develop handicraft businesses. In the interviews that I conducted, almost all the *nikkeijin* respondents believe that their experiences in Japanese factories or elsewhere had developed their administrative and mechanical skills, discipline, time consciousness, and groupwork ethic.

Most of my interviewees have obtained their college diplomas through the support of their *nikkeijin* relatives. The *nikkeijin* who have graduated from colleges and universities have diverse degrees: Education, English, Computer Science, Engineering, Veterinary Medicine, Commerce, and Accountancy. Consider the case of Cecilia, a *nikkeijin* from Iligan City. Her possession of a college degree of AB English with MA units was an edge for her to secure a stable employment in her province. A daughter of a public teacher (mother) and a Certified Public Accountant (father), Cecilia claimed that she had never been deprived financially until she married and bore two children. During her college years, she even received a scholarship for her academic excellence. Cecilia's career path was influenced by her family: her mother, sister, aunts, and other relatives were all teachers. However, she had to give up this dream because:

> It is difficult to make ends meet when you have children and if not for them, I wouldn't consider going abroad. It's really hard when you have children. The salary isn't really enough to be able to save. We couldn't afford to buy something beyond our everyday needs.

Jamilo, a Social Science teacher at La Union High School explained his reasons for migrating:

> When I was still a child, my Japanese grandmother told us a lot of things about the culture and life in Japan. I really wanted to go to Japan. However, my grandma discouraged me because she knew the hardship and difficulties that we might experience here. But I had to really think about the situation. With meager salary in the Philippines, life was pretty hard. My wage was not enough when I was still single because we used to travel a lot. It was already hard back then, how much more when I get married? I told myself that we need to go to Japan. Thus, together with my brothers, we processed our papers and left. That time, I was thinking that I would try it. My initial plan was to go back to the Philippines immediately after trying the kind of work here and I realized that it was very hard. But, what really encouraged me to stay was the salary because it was 10 times higher than my salary in the school where I used to work. That's why, I gave up my profession in the Philippines.

The aforementioned narratives indicate the periods of marriage and conceiving children as significant turning points for the respondents to realize the importance of migration. It has been repeated by other interviewees that migration has not been intended for self-pursuit but for the family's welfare, considering their goal of providing a better life for their children.

The loss of occupational status is a common dilemma for both Brazilian and Filipino *nikkeijin* especially for those who had professional jobs in their home countries. As previously mentioned, *nikkeijin* from the Philippines had stable job prior to migration. Most of them were teachers, government employees, call center agents, private office staffs, nurses, accountants, or owner of a small business enterprise, and so forth. In Japan, majority of the *nikkeijin* are currently employed as factory employees. Working in a factory line or conveyor, they describe their job as "repetitive," "monotonous," "routine," or "boring." Those with college degrees and professional experience in the Philippines expressed higher degree of difficulty during their first few months in Japan. Teresita, a business management graduate from Davao City shared her experience:

> The worst experience ever. I worked so hard to earn my college degree from Ateneo de Davao. Here, I can't even practice what I was trained for. I worked in a food manufacturing facility. It's not just a spaghetti factory, it's a food factory producing frozen products such as frozen spaghetti, frozen okonomiyaki, frozen takoyaki, etc. Our job was in the processing, like putting toppings…which sounds so simple but it was very fast. Later on, I was transferred to another section and the job was to refill spaghetti sauce. It was physically draining! I was carrying bags of sauce. One bag weighs 2.5 kilos or 3 kilos. Six bags in one banjo, and there were ten banjo in one line! I had to push carts for two lines... Traumatic.

Teresita and other *nikkeijin* accepted the job thinking that they would stay in Japan only temporarily. For them, this short-term blue-collar job is crucial in saving money to put up a small business in the Philippines. Neither a public school teacher's salary of PhP15,000 nor a call center agent's salary of PhP25,000 per month was comparable to a factory wage and overtime pay in Japan. In this research, majority

(33%) of the respondents said they receive JPY151,000 to JPY200,000 per month. Other *nikkeijin* who were fortunate to be employed in larger companies with more opportunities to do overtime work were able to receive salaries amounting to JPY300,000.

Aside from higher compensation, *nikkeijin* may also take advantage of the benefits provided by the Japanese government to financially support the migrant family. For instance, they are privileged to avail public housing, unemployment insurance, and public welfare assistance (*seikatsuhogo*). Those with a child or children may also receive children's allowance (*kodomo teate* or *jido teate*) (Carlos, 2013). Such compensation packages and benefits lured *nikkeijin* to prolong their stay in Japan.

While the majority seemed to have stable income in the Philippines, there were also narratives of financial difficulties and the lack of better opportunities. For them, migration was the best option to alleviate their families from poverty. One interesting case was told by Mario, a 54 year old *nikkeijin* from Manila. He worked as a traffic enforcer at the Metro Manila Development Authority (MMDA). For 23 years, Mario had worked on busy roads of the Metro, managing traffic, ensuring the safety of the pedestrians, and penalizing traffic violators. Mario narrated several opportunities to enrich himself by taking bribes from motorists, but his religious conviction as a member of the religious group Iglesia ni Cristo prevented him from engaging in such practices. Receiving a minimum-wage salary from the government, he borrowed money from numerous people and lending institutions. Consequently, Mario's debt piled up until he realized that migration was the only way of settling his gigantic loans. He left Manila in 2005 when his younger son was eight years old and his elder son was 11. Mario recalled:

> Life was hard back then. I used to be a poor government worker with a family to support. We used to eat dried fish (tuyo) and rice

for our daily meal. If not dried fish, Lucky Me (brand of noodles). You know the fact that our government doesn't provide decent salary, right? Our government doesn't give enough wages for the people, and they deduct so much: taxes and other deductions such as GSIS, COLA, Philhealth, so we did not have enough money.

It is also evident that the general objectives of *nikkeijin* migrants are to further improve their socio-economic status and obtain a long-term financial security by acquiring a permanent residency visa. With such status, Filipino *nikkeijin* derive a sense of security in holding a legal assurance of being able to work in Japan at any point of their lives, as a way to further improve their socio-economic status and hasten the accumulation of capital in preparation for their repatriation and permanent settlement in the Philippines.

Social Factors

Mostly coming from a close-knit family, *nikkeijin* consider migration as a way to reintegrate themselves with their family members, who have decided to work and live in Japan. In this case, chain or relay migration occurs within kinship system. While this trend has also been noted in Filipino migration to the US and other developed countries (see Liu, Ong, & Rosenstein, 1991), the presence of *nikkei* clans in Japan has further highlighted 'family reunion' as a salient motivation for more family members to migrate. Note that in this research, 86% of the respondents have mentioned "family reunification" as a major motivation (aside from economic factors) in migrating to Japan. About eight respondents (13%) explained that the reason of migration is propelled neither by financial nor by employment prospects, but simply by their longing for their family members.

The narrative of Ms. Fe, 35 years old, from General Santos City, is representative of such case:

I have a stable work in the Philippines but what really motivated me was first, my grandfather is a Japanese national. I want to see Japan because this is his birthplace. Second, my brothers are here. Then, my nephews and other close relatives are here.

The same reason was given by Elisa, 31, a Certified Public Accountant (CPA) from Davao City:

I never planned to come to Japan. That's the reason why I took accounting. I wanted to become a corporate lawyer, so during my younger days, Japan was not really a priority. But my uncle decided to work here and he even established his own (recruitment) agency. Thereafter my two sisters followed and processed my papers and urged me to come. After me, another sister came and now, we are all here in Japan.

Aside from "longing" for family members, some *nikkeijin* have disclosed their special reasons for coming to Japan. With varying factors, the common ground still lies in the dynamics of close-knit family ties. Teresita, whose parents own a farm in Davao, explained her main reason for leaving the Philippines:

Freedom. That's the only reason. It was like a breakthrough to all (sic). My lola, the Japanese national who stayed with us, was very strict. Of course, my parents were also strict. Our family is unusual. I find it really different from other families. Everything you say and do needs approval… and (experiencing the) same things over and over again made me feel exhausted. I knew I wanted to break free. I wanted to experience something new. I just wanted to be free.

While Teresita talked about her quest for freedom and finding it in Japan, others have narrated the opposite cause: they have come to Japan, as imposed by their relatives. Shane, a

graduate of BS Pharmacy from University of Sto. Tomas (UST), was planning to take up a medical course when her siblings pressured her to come to Japan. She admitted that migration, in her case, is "beyond my free will" due to the pressure imposed on her by her brothers and sisters. She explained:

> My siblings were too worried because I was living by myself in Manila. All my siblings were already working here. Then from time to time, they would say, 'oh we heard about the crimes there… we heard about many violent things happening around the Philippines…. it's not a safe place for you.' I felt pressured because my sources of financial support were my siblings. Well, my salary after I graduated was not enough for my daily expenses plus the lodging that I pay every month… so I really depended on their support. Thus, when they say something, I knew I had to comply and listen to what they had to say.

Shane's narrative also highlights the value of being family-oriented rather than being individualistic. For Shane, her family has always provided financial and emotional support during her younger years, and because of that, she has willingly allowed her siblings to intervene in her future plans. More importantly, Shane believes that reuniting with her siblings gave her more security and sense of belongingness, which further increased when she met her cousins, nephews, and nieces in Japan. She has no regrets of coming to Japan. She enjoys her work as well as the company of her relatives.

While Shane's case shows the protectiveness of her siblings, Jasmine's case presents the protectiveness of her parents as the sole reason for her going to Japan. Unlike Shane, Jasmine does not enjoy her life in Japan, but she cannot make a personal choice because of her past failures:

> Initially, I studied at the Davao Medical School Foundation, taking a nursing course, then I transferred to Mindanao Med. But, I realized

it was difficult. It's complicated and it would take so much time before I can go to the US. I also realized that I had no interest in nursing. I was not serious in studying at all. Most of the time, I would hang out with friends (barkada) rather than study and there were even times that I stopped schooling. Honestly, that time, I was trying to catch my parents' attention. They were workaholics and I felt abandoned. They had no time for me, and the only time they spent with me was the time when they would scold me and tell me things that would hurt me. And I also realized that they had more quality time for my brother. They liked my brother than me. So what I did? I hang out with friends. We used to drink a lot. I even drank while I was wearing school uniform. I even took drugs.

Asked who made the decision for her to come to Japan, Jasmine replied:

> My father (who is based in Japan) decided to take me with them… whether I liked it or not. He said nothing good will happen if I stay in the Philippines. I refused to leave, but my parents forced me to leave the Philippines. They said I was just wasting my life there.

The case of Jasmine shows the unusual case of migrant who was "forced" to migrate for family reintegration. Although this is not a typical case, it is important to note that not all migrant decisions are crafted by the migrants themselves. Migrant decisions, in the case of *nikkei* families, may come from the parents or siblings, who believe that Japan is a better alternative not only because of the economic benefits, but also because of the guidance and emotional security that they can offer to their family members. Furthermore, for those who have lost direction in the Philippines, migration offers the opportunity to restart and rebuild one's life.

Cultural Factors
The narratives in this study have so far revealed that majority of nikkei migrants were lured by

economic incentives and family reunification, coupled, for some, by their curiosity to discover and experience their ancestral culture. Unlike the Brazilian *nikkeijin* who regard cultural ties as one of their major motivations to "return" to their ancestral country, Filipino *nikkeijin* have been straightforward in revealing that the major impetus is economic, rather than cultural or ethnic reasons. However, it is important to take a deeper analysis of the narratives, as *nikkeijin* do not completely disregard ethnic, as well as cultural factors in shaping migrant decisions.

Nikkeijin have highlighted the principle of "ethnic right" as their legitimizing passport to Japan. While declaring their Filipino-oriented attitude and values, they also believe that the partial Japanese blood entitles them the legal right to enter, work, and stay for a long time. Responding to my question about his reasons to pursue an overseas work, Eric briefly replied, *"It's our right (karapatan). We have that right (to reside and work in Japan), and I want to take advantage of that…as a child of a Japanese, or as a descendant of a Japanese."*

Out of 60 narratives of migration, only four indicated "cultural discovery" as their first motivation and economic needs as the secondary reason. The case of Simon is the most interesting, as he repeatedly expressed his satisfaction with his financial prowess in the Philippines, yet he still decided to make a painful decision: to leave the Philippines and migrate to Japan.

Simon, a 50-year-old businessman from Manila commented that he was satisfied with his life in the Philippines and there was no need for him to work abroad. Prior to migration, he owned a ready-to-wear (RTW) shop in Divisoria. The business was going relatively well, but Simon had realized that he wanted to live in his ancestral place:

> Of course, I had dreamt of going to a place where the roots of my ancestry grew. There is a saying that a turtle would always go back to the place where it was hatched and will

lay its eggs there, no matter how far away it has reached. (Ang sabi, ang pagong kung saan initlog, kahit yan lumangoy ng malayo, babalik at babalik sya kung saan lugar sya pinisa at doon din siya mangingitlog.) You will always remember where you came from. You will always have a desire to discover that place and live there. Since I was a child, I knew that I have Japanese blood. I knew that my grandfather is from Japan. Since then, it's the place where I wanted to go.

Simon admitted that he had limited knowledge of Japan during his childhood. But somehow, he wanted an independent life. He remembered telling his father that he "wanted to live alone" when he was still 12 years old. Asked to elaborate what he meant by that, Simon paused for a minute before saying:

> I was searching for something and unfortunately I couldn't find it at that time. Of course, my dad did not allow me to leave our house during that young age, but I still left without their consent. Thus, I studied, and I survived living by myself. I married at the age of 25, but I was still dissatisfied. In every place where I settled in the Philippines, I was challenging myself and searching for something that I couldn't find.

Simon finally realized his emotional connection with Japan. Before migrating, he worked as a staff member in an office and school supply shop but he didn't like the job. He also worked as a driver of truck and other modes of private transportation. He later remarked that "*such job was more fulfilling than ever.*" The store in Divisoria was the most successful venture. Simon further commented, "*I didn't need to go to Japan or elsewhere because the store could make as much as Php30,000 (approximately JPY 55,000) in one day! What would I do in Japan back then? However, I realized that there was no progress in the Philippines.*" Aside from the motivation that points to cultural ties, Simon's narrative

also revealed a sense of pessimism regarding the Philippine economy. He strongly criticized the Philippines for the sluggish economy and corrupt political practices. In the end, he expressed his concerns about his children's employment opportunities. Simon concluded that his decision to migrate to Japan was initiated by his curiosity to live and experience the culture of his grandfather, and that desire was even reinforced by his pessimism about the state of economy and political stability in the Philippines.

Another *sansei* who deeply felt an ethnic attachment was Veronica. Like Simon, Veronica had a stable job in the Philippines prior to migration. With so much pride as a genuine *nikkeijin*, Veronica dreamed of living in her ancestral place:

> I remember my grandfather talking about Japan. And from the time we were still kids, I felt really proud of having a Japanese blood. When I was already matured (sic), we heard news about Japan's economy, Japan's industry, and the beauty of the country. Who wouldn't be proud of having a very small portion of Japanese blood? It was a small portion but I really felt proud, and I really dreamt of coming to this place. After all, I disliked the chaos and lack of discipline in Manila… and I knew that I belong somewhere else. For sure, that is because I feel the Japanese-ness (pagka-Hapon) within me.

While some interviewees emphasize their perception of cultural attachment, Filipino *nikkeijin* also face discrimination within and beyond their workplaces (see Vilog, 2012). Narratives of unjust working system and difficult working conditions were the common topics of discussions among Filipino migrants including *nikkeijin* during parties and social gatherings. My interviewees also complained about the differences of wages and benefits compared to their Brazilian and Japanese counterparts, the difficulty of workload and favoritism within their

workplaces, the loss of occupational status, and the marginalization of female Filipino *nikkeijin* workers as they were usually compared to Filipino entertainers or *Japayukis*. With these experiences, all my interviewees believe that they were treated like "*gaijin*" (foreigners) in spite of their *nikkei* status. Such discriminatory mechanisms were shaped not only by the factory management, but also the government which has produced *racialized* hierarchy that ascribes jobs, wages, rights, and privileges to certain groups of foreigners (Shipper, 2008). As a result, they have very limited interaction with the Brazilian *nikkeijin* and Japanese nationals. In fact, they have created an ethnic boundary that separates them from Japanese nationals and non-Filipino *nikkeijin*. This dynamics was clearly evident in Ohno and Iijima's (2010) survey report which shows that 63.7% of their respondents mostly interact with fellow Philippine *nikkeijin*, while only 15.6% frequently interact with Brazilian *nikkeijin*. Clearly, the experiences of discrimination have posed as hindrances to social integration within their ancestral homeland.

To conclude this section, it should be noted that economic incentives are not the only potential drivers of human migration. Castles' (2000) view of migration system has given a holistic perspective that is not only propelled by financial motives, but also driven by "labor recruitment, historical and cultural ties, political and military relationships, investment flows, and refugee movements" (p. 115). Castles also added that a "culture of migration" develops, in which remittances become a vital household strategy to improve security and income, thereby perpetuating flows, even if the original causes of migration cease to be relevant. This, again, supports the thesis of Tsuda which suggests that economic downturn, financial crises, and other socio-political challenges are unable to terminate a migration system that has been self-perpetuating and "structurally embedded". For instance, even during the height of the Global Financial Crisis

in 2008 when many factories shut down, Filipino *nikkeijin* still refused to return to the Philippines. Instead, they agreed to accept lower wages, sent back those family members not capable of working, availed government assistance and subsidies, or migrated to the other areas of Japan with better opportunities (Carlos, 2013).

The case of *nikkeijin* migration presents multifaceted factors that forge embeddedness into the Japanese economy and society. While economic or financial motivation remains the most influential driver of migration, Filipino *nikkeijin* have also considered social and cultural dimensions in crafting their individual decisions. It has been shown in this research how the kinship system plays a significant role in the decision-making, as well as the settlement processes. Finally, the cultural role has also contributed to the financial and social motivation due to their knowledge of being "partial Japanese," a symbolic identity of belonging to a nation that they barely know.

CHAIN MIGRATION AND TRANSNATIONALITY OF *NIKKEIJIN*

Considering the arduous processes from visa application, entry, up to the settlement period in Japan, *nikkeijin* migration has always been challenging. Despite the immigration hurdles, however, the inflow of third-generation has increased, thereby generating kinship-based *nikkeijin* communities in Japan. This tremendous increase of late-generation *nikkeijin* has been facilitated by chain migration, accompanied by the dynamic transnational activities of *nikkeijin* families in both the Philippines and Japan. This section describes these processes, and lays bare the mechanism behind the paradox of immigration politics: the *nikkeijin* themselves have orchestrated initiatives to provide support system to facilitate entry and integration to the host society. These are all done to fulfill

their economic goals. In fact, the continuous entry and conversion of fourth- and fifth-generation *nikkeijin* has challenged the notion of an "ethnicity-based migration" which was the cornerstone of the favorable immigration laws created to accommodate the *nikkeijin*.

Generation Upgrading

Chain migration is defined as "that movement in which prospective migrants learn of opportunities, are provided with transportation, and have initial accommodation and employment arranged by the primary social relationships with previous migrants" (Macdonald & Macdonald, 1964, p. 82). This process accurately reflects the case of Filipino *nikkeijin* who acquire their knowledge, motivation, resources, and employment ties from their family members. Interestingly, one salient feature of the *nikkei's* chain migration system is the legal process of "generation upgrading" that has led to the massive entry of kin members in Japan.

Generation upgrading is a practice whereby the second-generation *nikkeijin* converts his/her status to first-generation by acquiring *koseki* (family registry), listing their names in their ancestor's *koseki*, or other legal means. Usually, the second-generation applies for a full Japanese citizenship in order to entitle their grandchildren (who are de facto fourth-generation) to apply for a Japanese visa. The fourth-generation, then, becomes third-generation descendants, thereby qualifying them to enter and work in Japan. The practice has opened the possibility for the de-facto fourth and even fifth-generation *nikkeijin* in the Philippines to enter and work in the country. This process has multiplied the number of entrants of Filipino *nikkeijin* despite the stringent screening processes and court procedures.

An "upgraded" Veronica, an active member of a *nikkeijin* organization, explained the process in detail:

Many descendants ask me how they can help their children or grandchildren come to Japan. The most basic advice that I can give is- they have to upgrade their nationality. If his father or mother is a Japanese national, he should ask them to apply for their own *koseki*. When they do that, they would automatically become residents…and then citizens. That's how simple it is. Because if you are a sansei (third-generation), your father or mother is a nisei (second-generation). That means your parent is qualified to become a citizen. When they get their own *koseki*, your status from sansei becomes nisei as your parents can put your name, as well as your children's name to the new *koseki*. Therefore, your children can come to Japan anytime soon.

The decision to pursue "generation upgrading" is usually geared toward the continuous migration of those next in line. Thinking about the "better future" of their children and grandchildren, many second- and third-generation *nikkeijin* have continuously proceeded with generation upgrading process to ensure the entry of their descendants to Japan. As Mel explained:

If it's just me, I am not interested in becoming a Japanese; and I would have never gone through that tedious process. That's such a hassle. But this is really for my children and grandchildren, because time will come when they will eventually think about their lives and the place where they want to stay. If I wouldn't undergo this process, I feel like I'm depriving them of this choice- the choice of staying, working, and being happy here. I don't want them to blame me one day, and say, it would have been better if they have a legal status here because every Filipino now wants to go to richer countries for the future of their children and grandchildren.

Mel's views reflect her Filipino principles and values of close family ties. She feels responsible for the future not only of her children, but also of her grandchildren and great-grandchildren. Mel also believes that as much as possible, her family, relatives, and the incoming descendants should maintain physical proximity to each other and provide mutual support for all the needs of one another.

Melay, another *nikkeijin*, describes the domino effect of the process of generation upgrading among Filipino *nikkeijin*:

Originally, I am a third-generation descendant. But my mom decided to upgrade. The reason is because of my nieces and nephews. They cannot come to Japan after the age of 18, so they pressured my mom to explore the option of changing the citizenship so that my nieces can come anytime. Currently, my sisters and I are second-generation, and again, my sisters are pressured to have their own *koseki* because they, too, are thinking about the future of their grandchildren and descendants. Hence, it's like a continuous, endless process of accommodating our relatives and descendants here in Japan.

As described by Melay, the process of generation upgrading has allowed several generations to come and work in Japan for the past two decades. The implication of this process is evident in the burgeoning of Filipino *nikkeijin* population in the past years; leading to their social embeddedness. It is therefore logical to assume that the Filipino *nikkeijin* is still continuously increasing due to such legal strategy that legitimized the *nikkei* status of the younger generation descendants.

Circular Migration

After hurdling the challenges of legal procedures, a *nikkeijin* would have to contend with the socio-political impediments for integration. These are by no means easy; hence *nikkeijin* have, through the years, become mobile migrants who shuttle back and forth between Japan and the Philippines. As opposed to the orthodox assimilation theories that assumed

the weakening of a migrant's attachment to the home country, *nikkeijin* have maintained a strong sense of connection to the Philippines even after several years of being a Permanent Resident in Japan. Reflecting on the mobility pattern and behavior of *nikkeijin*, I referred to Kastoryano's (2002, as cited in Vertovec, 2009) observation that migrants with transnational networks and lifestyles demonstrate a social scheme in which "the country of origin becomes a source of identity and the country of residence as a source of right" (p. 88).

Indeed, Philippine *nikkeijin* have consistently identified themselves as Filipinos, thereby attesting that the Philippines remains the source of cultural identity. In spite of the economic incentives of migration, almost all the interviewees plan to repatriate to the Philippines after their labor sojourn. In fact, they initially planned a short, contract-bound employment in Japan; yet socio-economic factors have evidently prolonged or sustained their migration.

Similar to the case of Brazilian *nikkeijin* wherein the number of repeat entrants has significantly increased since 2000 (Takenoshita, 2007), I have heard anecdotes from key informants that some *nikkeijin* return to the Philippines after working for a year or two in a Japanese factory. Although these migrants had initially expressed their unwillingness to go back to Japan after their first homecoming in the Philippines, they have been back to Japan for their second, or even third or fourth sojourn. The usual reasons for this are either financial, when their savings and investment from the first sojourn dried up, or family, when they realize that their family members and relatives are all settled in Japan.

They have become "structurally embedded" to the host society; thereby failing to discontinue the process of migration. Eager to return to their home communities in the Philippines yet trapped in the dilemma of structural embeddedness, *nikkeijin* have become "circular migrants"—

labor itinerants who leave and return to Japan repetitively.

The first reason—financial need—is a typical account of a Filipino migrant, including non-*nikkei* workers. Danny, a *nikkeijin* who has been residing in Japan for more than 10 years, talked about the reasons for the cyclical pattern of migration:

> They come back because they don't invest. Some don't even save. So, eventually, they realize that they don't have money…and how can they feed their family members? They won't earn enough in the Philippines. They had to come back.

True enough, I have interviewed four return entrants that fit Danny's depiction. Having experienced the difficulty of earning money in the Philippines that could equal, if not exceed the income that they earn from their factory job, they decided to start another journey with the hope of obtaining more funds for future investment and insurance.

The second reason—family—is something peculiar for the *nikkei* families. Refering to Latin American *nikkeijin*, Yamanaka (2000, p.14) maintained that a "circular diaspora" among second- and third- generations was formed by the "cultural and historical circumstances within which supply-push and demand-pull factors are embedded." For Philippine *nikkeijin*, returning to their home community is a socio-cultural venture to reunite with their family members, relatives, and friends, while undertaking cultural practices that they missed during their sojourn overseas.

While culturally attached to their source community, the Philippine *nikkeijin* also demonstrates social embeddedness caused by the transfer of social support system to the host community. In short, while they wanted to permanently return to the Philippines, their socio-economic status has also been attached to the host society, thereby sustaining migration and instigating a pendulum pattern of mobility, or an

ethnicity-induced system of circular migration. This is best explained by Janette, a former factory worker who decided to establish a business in Manila, but eventually returned to Japan:

> My father, mother, sisters, grandparents, and cousins are here. I have more support system here than in the Philippines. There's no reason to stay in Manila if everyone is here.

Janette's narrative is representative of many circular migrants. As previously highlighted, Japan has become a second "home" because of the presence of family members and relatives who were able to enter through generation upgrading. Repatriation and permanent settlement in the Philippines become problematic due to the limited source of social support in their home communities. Furthermore, repatriation also became detrimental to their Japan-born children who speak and understand Nihongo. These children have become acculturated to the Japanese socio-cultural environment.

CONCLUSION

This paper discussed the paradox of immigration politics in various aspects and dimensions using the case of the Philippine *nikkeijin*. First, I highlighted the policy rationale of the 1990 Immigration Law which opened Japan's doors for the *nikkeijin* to visit their relatives, experience their ancestral culture, and provide them the opportunity to socially reintegrate. While some interviewees were inclined to fulfill such cultural enticements, most Philippine *nikkeijin* were merely "opportunity migrants" who wanted to improve their economic conditions. Evidently, socio-cultural attachment remained secondary to their economic pursuit. The *nikkeijin* status has become instrumental to legitimize migration, and compete with other Japan-bound economic migrants who also wanted to explore Japan's competitive job market. Understandably, the Philippine

nikkeijin's quest is similar to the strategies of other immigrants who, according to Castles and Miller (2009, p. 36), "invoke" ethnicity as a "criterion for self-identification" and ultimately a means to "maximize the power of a group in a situation of market competition."

Second, I explored the paradox of policy rationale and the law's implementation through the experience of Filipino descendants. Although Japan's immigration law prioritized *nikkeijin* through the notion of co-ethnicity and cultural proximity, the Philippine *nikkeijin* had gone through legal battles, political struggles, and stringent screening processes prior to the approval of their visa. Early Filipino *nikkeijin* struggled to win ethnic recognition because of their mixed lineage and lack of legal evidence to prove their Japanese ancestral background. And ultimately, even after the government's recognition of these descendants, thousands of them are still contending before Japan's family court to acquire a legal *nikkeijin* status. For those who were able to migrate, another policy contradiction is experienced in their forefathers' land: the principle of co-ethnicity becomes more irrelevant as *nikkeijin* are treated as foreigners, with very limited prospect of achieving integration. While it is justifiable to assert that Filipino *nikkeijin* have lesser degree of consanguinity due to the mixed marriages of their ancestors, I argue that the 1990 Immigration Law had provided all the legal and political opportunities for Japan to augment cultural affinity and socially integrate these descendants to their ancestral homeland. It was a missed opportunity to "Japanize" the Philippine *nikkeijin* and to encourage them to settle permanently in Japanese society which currently faces demographic problems, ageing population, and labor shortages.

Despite the aforementioned challenges caused by immigration politics, how can we explain the dynamic, prolonged, and sustained process of *nikkeijin* migration from the Philippines? Addressing this question, I turned to the analysis of Takeyuki Tsuda who focused his research on the case of Brazilian-Japanese migrants.

The "permanence of temporary migration" of Brazilian *nikkeijin* was explained through the notion of "structural embeddedness" (Tsuda, 1999). Thus, I examined the narratives of my interviewees and explored the parallelism of Brazilian and Filipino experiences. While migration is primarily propelled by economic pursuit, it is also evident how social pressure and cultural values embed the migrant to the host society. Interestingly, *nikkei* migration is more often a collective decision, or an option negotiated with the household members, rather than an individual choice. More fascinating in the case of Philippine *nikkeijin* is the strategy to sustain chain migration by "generation upgrading," making it possible to accommodate as many relatives as they can during their sojourn. Consequently, this process prolonged the period of migration, and created an exclusive circle that seemed "separated" from the Japanese and even Latin American *nikkeijin* communities.

Structural embeddedness, then, is demonstrated by the multilayered economic, social, and cultural factors that attached the Philippine *nikkeijin* migrants not only to the labor market, but also to the host society and the community that they have strategically created in articulating their transnational identities. This notwithstanding, Filipino *nikkeijin* remain torn against the cultural ties and emotions towards the country where they were raised, alongside difficulties of cultural integration with the Japanese people. Perhaps that paradox will gradually be resolved further down the line of Filipino *nikkeijin* generations, as children are born and bred alongside their Japanese co-ethnics.

REFERENCES

Aichi Prefectural Government. (2011). *Manufacturing companies in Aichi Prefecture*. Retrieved from http://www.pref.aichi.jp/ricchitsusho/monozukuri50/about.en/index.html

Carlos, M. R. (2013). The impacts of the 2008 global recession on foreign workers in Japan: Focus on Filipino long-term and permanent residents on Shiga and Chiba Prefectures. *Kokusai Shakai Bunka Kenkyujo Kiyou, 15*, 222-239.

Castles, S. (2000). *Ethnicity and globalization*. London: Sage Publication.

Castles, S., & Miller, M. (2009). *The age of migration: International population movements in the modern world*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.

Commission on Filipinos Overseas. (2014). *CFO: About Us*. Retrieved from http://www.cfo.gov.ph/.

de Carvalho, D. (2003). *Migrants and identity in Japan and Brazil: The Nikkeijin*. London: Routledge Curzon.

Dumlao, D. (2014, January 13). OFW remittances to increase by 8.5% in 2014- Standard Chartered. *Philippine Daily Inquirer*. Retrieved from http://business.inquirer.net/160057/ofw-remittances-to-increase-by-8-5-in-2014-standard-chartered

Fresnoza-Flot, A. (2008). Labor migration and minority group empowerment: The *nikkeijin* in Davao and their association. *Asian Studies, 44*(1), 66-101.

Fuess, S. J. (2003). Immigration policy and highly skilled workers: The case of Japan. *Contemporary Economic Policy, 21*(2), 243-257.

Higuchi, N. (2003). Migration process of Nikkei Brazilians. In M. Yamada (Ed.), *Emigracion, Latinoamerica: Comparicion interregional entre America del Norte, Europa y Japon* (pp. 379-406). Osaka: Japan Center for Asia Studies.

Iosifides, T. (2011). *Qualitative methods in migration studies*. Burlington: Ashgate Publishing Company.

Immigration Information Center. (2012). *Start of a new residency management system!* [Brochure]. Tokyo: Tokyo Regional Immigration Bureau.

Kondo, A. (2002). The development of immigration policy in Japan. *Asian and Pacific Migration Journal, 11*(4), 415-435.

Komai, H. (2001). *Foreign migrants in contemporary Japan*. Melbourne: TransPacific Press.

Levitt, P. (1998). Social remittances: Migration-driven local-level forms of cultural diffusion. *International Migration Review, 32*(4), 926-948.

Liu, J. M., Ong, P., & Rosenstein, C. (1991). Dual chain migration: Post-1965 Filipino immigration to the United States. *International Migration Review, 25*(3), 487-513.

Mabunay, M. L. (2006). Tracing the roots of the *Nikkeijin* of Panay, Philippines. *Danyag*, *11*(2), 137-174.

Macdonald, J., & Macdonald, L. (1964). Chain migration: Ethnic neighborhood formation and social networks. *Millbank Memorial Fund Quarterly, 2*(1), 82-97.

Martin, P., Abella, M., & Midgley, E. (2004). Best practices to manage migration. *International Migration Review, 38*(4), 1544-1560.

Morris-Suzuki, T. (2010). *Borderline Japan: Foreigners and frontier controls in the post war era.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Nibe, N. (2008). Cities and class structure in the advanced industrial area: Industrial globalization during 30-year period in Aichi. *Journal of the School of Letters, 4*, 51-63.

Ohno, S. (2008). Transnational citizenship and deterritorialized identity: The meanings of Nikkei diasporas' shuttling between the Philippines and Japan. *Asian Studies, 44*(1), 1-22.

Ohno, S. (2007). Regaining Japaneseness: The politics of recognition by the Philippine *nikkeijin*. *Asian Studies Review, 31*, 243-260.

Ohno, S., & Iijima, M. (2010). *Citizenships, lives and identities of the Philippine nikkeijin residing in Japan: Reports on the results of a nationwide questonnaire survey.* Fukuoka: Kyushu University Asia Center.

Okamura, J. (1998). Imagining the Filipino-American diaspora: Transnational relations, identities and communities. New York: Routledge.

Philippine *Nikkeijin* Legal Support Center, Inc. (2013). Shuseki updates. *Nikkeijin News*, 20.

Philippine *Nikkeijin* Legal Support Center, Inc. (2013). Shuseki updates. *Nikkeijin News*, 21.

Rebick, M. (2005). *The Japanese employment system: Adopting to a new economic environment*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Sharpe, M. O. (2010). What does blood membership mean in political terms?: The political incorporation of Latin American *Nikkeijin* (Japanese Descendants) (Lan) in Japan 1990-2004. *Japanese Journal of Political Science, 12* (1), 113-142.

Shipper, A. (2008). *Fighting for foreigners.* Ithaca: Cornell University.

Takenoshita, H. (2007). Transnationalism among Japanese Brazilian migrants: Circular migration and their socio-economic positions. ASA 2007 Conference, Auckland, New Zealand, 4-7 December 2007. http://www.tasa.org.au/conferences/conferencepapers07/papers/382.pdf. Accessed 12 September 2014.

Tanno, K. (2010). The economic crisis and foreign workers in Japan: Why does Japan treat migrant worksers as second class citizens? *Japan Labor Review, 7*(3), 109-126.

Tsuda, T. (2003). *Strangers in the ethnic homeland: Japanese Brazilian return migration in transnational perspective*. New York: Columbia University Press.

Tsuda, T. (1999). The permanence of temporary migration: The structural embeddedness of Japanese-Brazilian immigrant workers in Japan. *The Journal of Asian Studies, 58*(3), 687-722.

Tsuda, T. (2010). Ethnic return migration and the nation-state: Encouraging the diaspora to return home. *Journal for the Association for the Study of Ethnicity and Nationalism , 16* (4), 616-636.

Vertovec, S. (2009). *Transnationalism.* London: Routledge.

Vilog, R. B. (2012). Perceived discrimination in ancestral homeland: Filipino *nikkeijin*s and the dynamics of migrant resistance. *Asia Pacific Social Science Review, 12*(2), 33-49.

Vogt, G. (2013). When the leading goose gets lost: Japan's demographic change and the non-reform of its migration policy. *Journal of Critical Perspectives on Asia, 49*(2), 14-44.

Wah, W. H. (1999). *Japanese bosses, Chinese workers: Power and control in a Hongkong megastore.* New York: Routledge.

Yamanaka, K. (2000). I will go home, but when?: Labor migration and circular diaspora formation by Japanese Brazilian in Japan. In M. Douglass & G. Roberts (Eds.), *Japan and global migration: Foreign workers and the advent of a multicultural society* (pp.120-149). London: Routledge.

Yu-Jose, L. (2000). Japan: Curio, enemy, inspiration, model, and now? In L. Yu-Jose & R. Palanca-Tan (Eds.), *Philippines and Japan: Directions and challenges: Selected papers from the third and fourth international conference on Japanese studies* (pp. 1-15). Quezon City: Japanese Studies Program, Ateneo de Manila University